

My association and friendship with characters like Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan, has always attracted others of a like mind to my door. I guess you could say I'm friends with what some might consider the evilest of evil and the darkest of dark.

Lucien Greaves of The Satanic Temple is one of the like minds that ended up at my door well over a decade ago... Lucien's real name is: Doug Messner.

I remember it like it was yesterday... Doug wanted a copy of a book I published with a foreword from my pal, Anton LaVey. I guess he had tried to buy it thru my underground publishing company, Michael Hunt Publishing, to no avail.

The book Doug was seeking: MIGHT IS RIGHT - Survival of the fittest.

Doug traveled from Detroit to my offices in Chicago to buy that book. When he did, he left me a stack of sketch books and notepads of his original writings. This bold statement of trust led to Doug producing illustrations for a future, special edition of MIGHT IS RIGHT, it also started an over decade long friendship and working relationship.

I've always seen my association with LaVey, him making me a Revrend in the Church of Satan and the work I've done with Doug as an artistic and political expression, much like the yippies, the american indian movement, the black panthers and others who fearlessly explore expression thru the theater of the absurd on the world stage.

So, there's my disclaimer of bias, as well as the reason Doug trusts me to let the black cat out of the bag as far as The Satanic Temple and the person behind Lucien Greaves.

- Is The Satanic Temple a satanic group or a satirical group?

That is a common question, and I say, *why can't it be both?* We are coming from a solid philosophy that we absolutely believe in and adhere to. This is Satanism, and to us it couldn't be called anything other than Satanism. However, our metaphor of Satan is a literary construct inspired by authors such as Anatole France and Milton -- a rebel angel defiant of autocratic structure and concerned with the material world. Satanism as a rejection of superstitious supernaturalism. This Satan, of course, bears no resemblance to the embodiment of all cruelty, suffering, and negativity believed in by some apocalyptic segments of Judeo-Christian culture. The word "Satan" has no inherent value. If one acts with compassion in the name of Satan, one has still acted with compassion. Our very presence as civic-minded socially responsible Satanists serves to satirize the ludicrous superstitious fears that the word "Satan" tends to evoke.

- reminds me of a gothic yes-men.

Yes. Just as the Yes Men use very catching theatrical plays to draw attention to a progressive agenda, we play upon people's irrational fears in a way that hopefully causes them to re-evaluate what they think they know, causes them to redefine arbitrary labels, and hopefully to judge people for their concrete actions. I believe that where reason fails to persuade, satire and mockery prevail. Whereas many religious groups seem to eschew humor, we embrace it.

- why, doug, why... why would you go from behind the scenes to in front of the camera, knowing just how bad it can get for the public satanist, atheist and most activists for that matter, you are an activist, correct?

The Satanic Temple was actually conceived of independent from me by a friend and one of his colleagues. They envisioned it more as a "poison pill" in the Church/State debate -- the idea being that Satanists, asserting their rights and privileges -- where religious agendas have been successful in imposing themselves upon public affairs -- could serve as a poignant reminder that such privileges are for *everybody*, and can be used to serve an agenda beyond the current narrow understanding what "the" religious agenda is. So at the inception, the political message was primary, though it was understood that there are, in fact, self-identified Satanists who live productive lives within the boundaries of the Law, and that they do deserve just as much consideration as any other religious group. I was brought in originally as a consultant due to my expertise in the history of witch-hunts and my understanding regarding conceptions of Satanism. While the original thinking was that The Satanic Temple needed to hold to some belief in a supernatural entity known as "Satan", none of us truly believed that. I helped develop us into something we all do truly believe in and wholeheartedly embrace: an atheistic philosophical framework that views "Satan" as a metaphorical construct by which we contextualize our works. It provides narrative structure. Lucifer as an icon of revolt against tyranny and the ultimate advocate for knowledge in the material world. A productive and motivating narrative is what religion is at it's best. In the beginning, *Lucien Greaves* was just this shell of a character -- a Facebook account set up so that a Satanic Temple page could be generated without attaching anybody's real name to it. As I became active in defining the organization, I became Lucien Greaves, the official spokesperson for The Satanic Temple. We've moved well beyond being a simple political ploy and into being a very sincere movement that seeks to separate religion from superstition and to contribute positively to our cultural dialogue. To this end, I am very much an activist. Satanism has traditionally been a facile outgroup label used to unjustly malign and marginalize people. We stand publicly on their behalf, offering a counter-force to conspiracy theorists and delusional paranoiacs. I'm sure it will get ugly, but I'm happy to come out from behind the scenes and fight the good fight if we even accomplish a fraction of what we're trying to achieve.

- knowing you for so long, the satanic temple seems like an extension of your life's work and study... what exactly are you fighting, trying to change, or needing to prove - what's the goal, doug?

I grew up in the shadow of what is now known to sociologists as "the Satanic Panic" -- an

embarrassing episode of witch-hunting in the modern era. I was horrified by daytime Talk Show fables of homicidal Satanic cult hordes. I became very curious, later on, regarding the question of the truth of the conspiracy claims, and I began pursuing this as an active study. Was there any truth at all to the idea of murderous Satanic cults? In fact, there is no unbroken tradition of Satanism, no canonized Satanic doctrine that extends back for centuries into biblical times. Nor is there one uniform concept of Satan. Anton LaVey's Satanic Bible was released in 1969, and contained no indication of the anti-human doctrine alleged by hysterical anti-satanists.

Sometimes, however, anti-Satanist conspiracy theorists would point to particular groups of alleged "Satanists" as evidence of their claims. I went looking for these alleged Satanic cults and found no substance to the claims against them. I met you, Shane, and you were a priest in the Church of Satan who was conferred with that title by Anton Lavey himself. You and I found and interviewed inner circle members of the notorious Process Church of The Final Judgement, which was said by some to be the world's most dangerous "Satanic" cult. Through you, I met a variety of self-proclaimed Satanists of the Laveyan school and others, finding them to be a demographic no more burdened by psychopathy than any other (and, in fact, full of some very thoughtful, intelligent people). I illustrated an edition of *Might Is Right*, the text of which Lavey had built the Satanic Bible from, and which you published -- along with a forward by Lavey -- when you were running Michael Hunt publishing. In all that time, I never encountered credible evidence of a criminal Satanic network.

In 2009, I went to a "Ritual Abuse/Mind-Control" conference in Connecticut where I listened to "experts" elaborate upon their beliefs in Satanic Ritual crimes. I thought they would be a fringe grouping of delusional people holding firmly to incredible beliefs, hurting nobody but themselves. What I found instead was a twisted subculture of *licensed* therapists, and their clients, who subscribe to a pseudoscientific belief in "dissociative amnesia": the theory that some events -- particularly sexual abuse -- can be so uniquely traumatic that the conscious mind cannot comprehend it, and thus those memories are "repressed". This school of "therapy" breeds conspiracy theory and literally indoctrinates clients into false beliefs in a Satanic threat. Clients are encouraged to "remember" episodes of abuse that are presumed to have been concealed from their conscious minds, and when the evidence doesn't match their confabulatory false memories, they explain it away as evidence of a much larger conspiracy -- a *Satanic* conspiracy. With the false veneer of Science, these "experts" in dissociation have kept a witch hunt alive. Innocent people have been convicted and imprisoned on the "evidence" of recovered memory testimony, even though this is the exact same "evidence" we have for alien abduction, and is the same "therapeutic" process by which people practice "past life regression". I have a long and complex body of writing, much of which can be read at www.process.org, where I detail in a number of articles how this cult-like therapy subculture continues to ruin the lives of innocent people. So one of my own goals is to destroy this harmful pseudoscientific practice, and dispel myth of an international Satanic conspiracy. The broader goal of The Satanic Temple in general is to advocate for all of those who are *unjustly* maligned, demonized, or marginalized -- victimized by conspiracy theorists and dogmatic supernaturalists. We seek to assert the rights of religious non-believers and skeptics. We also hope to provide the philosophical framework by which our membership may hone their cognitive tools to never fall victim to those forces.

- as I'm sure you know, I've wanted to be an advocate for school shooters as I consider myself a school shooter before school shooting was cool... I'm assuming the school shooter might be covered under TST's advocacy? how would this work, would a troubled youth or a shunned satanic soda-pop maker contact TST and ask for advice?

Our public schools are based on a prison model. They are dysfunctional, counterproductive, and cruel. We have an outrageous number of children being subjected to arbitrary searches, corporal punishment, and kept under constant surveillance. An alarming number of students are being prescribed psychotropic drugs to keep them docile. They are in an oppressive environment of forced associations that breed contempt. It certainly isn't surprising that we have some very alienated and unhappy youths who exercise some very drastic notions. We would love to be an outreach for those students before they are brought to the breaking point of violence. We would love to be a resource for them to learn and understand their rights. As Satanists we want to assert the religious rights of students in our membership in any way we can that might help mitigate their suffering in the schooling environment. One of our co-founding members is a respected and outspoken critic of compulsory education who holds an Education Policy degree from Harvard, and he'll be working with our lawyers to determine ways in which we can assert religious privilege for Satanic students toward that end. As for an individual like yourself who was run out of town by frightened and ignorant locals who were terrified of your Satanic affiliations, we want to aggressively pursue litigation in cases of religious intolerance against Satanists -- even (and perhaps especially) in those cases in which "Satanism" is used as an accusation, even where no actual evidence of Satanism is found.

- and what the hell is a religious non-believer?

It is our goal to separate religion from superstition. Religion can, and should, be a metaphorical narrative construct by which we give meaning and direction to our lives and works. Our religions should not require of us that we submit ourselves to unreason and untenable supernatural beliefs based on literal interpretations of fanciful tales. Non-believers have just as much right to religion -- and any exemptions and privileges being part of a religion brings -- as anybody else.

- Some might think based on your study of the mind and the TST actions, that your real agenda is to become a cult leader, is this the true goal of the organization?

I studied, and continue to study, Cognitive Science. I also have a good deal of background studying cults and coercion. My focus, however, is in teaching people to recognize cultic influence, and help them learn ways in which they can resist coercive influences. The Satanic Temple encourages people to harbor reasonable agnosticism in all things, and to hold only to that which is demonstrably true. We will not dictate who our membership can and can not affiliate with, nor are we even interested in having them pledge any type of fealty to us whatsoever. To the contrary, we want to provide them with the philosophical framework and the cognitive tools to exercise their critical thinking skills in such a way that will help immunize them from the various mystical charlatans who seek to convert them into credulous followers. We do

not want followers. We seek to build and offer support to leaders. We do not seek to build a rigid authoritarian structure -- such would be the very antithesis of Satanism. Far from being a cult, The Satanic Temple could even be described as the anti-cult.

- the difference between you and the CoS?

The Church of Satan, founded by *Satanic Bible* author Anton Lavey, was active, it seems, during Lavey's own lifetime, but appears to be almost entirely defunct now. It's currently reduced to a website from which one may buy a membership card, but I'm not aware of any actual activities that they've been involved in during the past couple of decades. The CoS may believe that it provides a service simply by being a rallying point for "like-minded individuals", but the value of that has been greatly diminished since the internet era, now that obscure niche groups are always within reach of our social networks -- nor do they require a \$200 entry fee [the cost of a CoS membership card]. I believe that organizations should be measured for their effect in the real world, and should work to advance the general goals of their membership. We must constantly work to prove ourselves to our membership, not the other round. It is up to us to effect the cultural dialogue for their benefit. We will not be an insular group that merely markets a sense of identity.

- I recall, in our early days of working together that you thought the CoS should have lobbyists, on the ground, in washington d.c., is this a goal for TST?

Yes, it is. By the time the New Atheism movement took hold, Satanism appeared to be a silly little throwback to the 1960s -- absolutely no political influence, no known agenda, no advocacy whatsoever. Even in the high-profile West Memphis 3 case, there was no discernable noise from an established Satanic organization expressing outrage over the fact that the idea of Satanism, in and of itself, was used as an accusation to convict innocent kids of murder. This kind of inaction is worse than worthless -- it's counter-productive. There is no point in running an organization unless you are going to organize. There is no point in being a part of an organization if that organization is not going to work to address the concerns and advance the goals of its membership. We are in the process of setting up a legal fund, we are strategizing a number of future campaigns, and we are aggressively going to pursue the agendas we put forward.

- The CoS has recently posted about TST, without directly mentioning TST. They seem to be trying to separate themselves from TST because of your referencing the afterlife in your ritual? are you a spiritual satanist, a theistic satanist or is the satanic temple adding to LaVey's philosophy, much like LaVey had added to Ragnar Redbeards might is right?

They misinterpret what we were doing, but that's not entirely their fault. Something that I explained in a number of interviews with media -- but that failed to show up in the majority of them -- is the fact that I do not believe in the supernatural. Instead, when we performed our Pink Mass at the grave of the mother of the Westboro Baptist Church's founder, Fred Phelps, we

were playing upon his own ludicrous superstitious fears. Our position is that *due to Phelps's beliefs, he is now obligated to believe that his mother is gay in the afterlife. We believe that Fred Phelps now believes that his mother is gay, and nobody can question our right to believe that Fred Phelps believes this, regardless of what even he may say.* It's turning the tables on Westboro's own 'inviolability of belief' arguments. Ironically, the CoS has never fully renounced supernaturalism, as we have.

And, yes, we are adding to Lavey. Lavey is an excellent jumping-off point, but his work was a product of its time, and it's appropriate to recontextualize it to today's reality. Lavey was active during a time in which, for decades, the United States was on a dysfunctional spiral of increasing violence. Lavey's rhetoric tended toward Social Darwinistic Police State politics as a result. Since 1995, violence in the United States -- and, in fact, the world over -- has been in decline, and we're now in a position to evaluate what's working for us, and where we went wrong previously. Certainly, a strong and effective police presence is a contributing factor, but we also find that autocratic governments breed social violence. We also find that Social Darwinism, interpreted in brutal, strictly self-interested terms, is counter-productive, and based on a simplistic misinterpretation of evolutionary theory. We do better when we work in groups, where altruism and compassion are rewarded. We are social animals. That said, however, I believe in a system that runs meritocratically. Also, revenge is a natural impulse, without which Justice would never be served. We should do our best to mitigate the pain of those who are suffering, whoever they are -- but also be diligent to punish the misdeeds of those who behave unjustly to those around them.

- please, tell me about the documentary you're filming... this is the project that launched TST, correct?

When The Satanic Temple was conceived, the idea was that a documentary would be assembled from the various actions we would perform to put a new spin on the entire Church/State debate. To that end, we staged a rally in support of Florida Governor Rick Scott's passage of Senate Bill 98, a bill that essentially allowed for prayer in school. While many groups were upset and offended that Scott was advancing a conservative Christian agenda, we staged a Satanic rally thanking Rick Scott for endorsing a bill that allowed *Satanism* in schools, ensuring that children who might otherwise never learn of the Satanic creed could be exposed to it in the classroom. This was a harsh reminder that religious freedom applies to *all*, and the United States is a nation based upon religious pluralism. During that time, we generated a lot of genuine interest from people looking to embrace a politically active, relevant Satanism. More and more we developed into a full-blown organization with a very profound mission. Now -- although we have still been filming everything -- we have no clearly defined film project regarding The Satanic Temple in the works to speak of. The idea of a film has become secondary, at best.

- most satanists struggle with the ego issue... what happens if you fail to raise the funds needed for the highway fund?

Then we move onto the next thing, or we make up the slack on the highway fund through another venue. It may sound platitudinous, but there is no shame in not reaching the goal, only in not trying at all. We haven't, and won't, gamble our entire organization on any one project. There are some things we'll do that won't work out as planned, and others that will surely hit the mark -- but we'll keep working...

- and hey, what's the deal with TST logo, what's it symbolize? the wife and I, well, we figured, with the cow skull that TST long term goals might be a bar and grill... the logo would be perfect for that you know??? maybe a hot wings joint?

That's not a bad idea, so long as I can serve the new 'Kale Seitan' dish I've been perfecting.